



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – March 8, 2013
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Daniel C. Esty
Presented by Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen

RAISED HOUSE BILL NO. 6539 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE FORMER SUNRISE RESORT PROPERTY

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised House Bill 6539 - An Act Concerning The Former Sunrise Resort Property. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) offers the following comments and background on the state's ownership of the land in East Haddam that at one time was the Sunrise Resort.

The DEEP (then DEP) purchased the 143 acre property along the Salmon River in East Haddam in 2009. The property is the site of the former Sunrise Resort, the last in a line of summer resorts on the land (Elm Camp, Ted Hilton's, Frank Davis), and one of dozens of vacation resorts in the immediate area which had their heyday from the 1930's to the 50's. By the turn of the century, almost all of the resorts had closed due to dwindling interest in this type of vacation experience. The owner offered the land for sale, and ultimately sold the land, with its many deteriorating buildings to the state in 2009.

After the state's purchase of the land, local officials urged the DEEP to consider public/private partnership uses of the property that would help spur economic activity for the community and potentially generate tax revenue to the town. The DEEP has invested a great deal of staff time and effort over the past few years to further this goal. Below is a brief chronology of the activity the DEEP has undertaken to attempt to accommodate these requests from the town.

At the beginning of 2010, the state embarked on a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) process to gauge the range and type of re-use proposals that might be available for us to consider. The responses we received included a commercial water park, as well as other varied uses. What became clear to the Department during this process was that there were a great number of questions that arose by potential developers regarding the current conditions on the property, including condition of the infrastructure, utilities, and a range of other issues. This lack of baseline information had a negative effect on potential developers' ability to fully analyze the property and its possible uses. In an effort to create a level of knowledge about the conditions of the property, we engaged an engineering consulting firm to do a conditions assessment of the property, including an evaluation of the wells, and water distribution system; subsurface disposal systems; electrical and telecommunications; and stormwater drainage systems. This report was prepared and delivered to the state in December of 2010, and is available on the DEEP website.

Throughout this time period, we were aware that many, if not most, of the structures on the property were unlikely to be usable, given their lack of building code compliance, and deteriorated condition, but we were reluctant to engage in any significant demolition on the property, not wanting to take buildings down that may have been important to one or more potential developers.

In 2011, the agency embarked on the more formal Request for Proposals Process (RFP) to invite ideas for public/private partnerships involving the property. A copy of the full RFP invitation is available on the DEEP website. The consultant's engineering report was made available to all applicants as an addendum to the RFP. The RFP was officially issued in December of 2011, with responses due in March of 2012. In March, we received only two formal responses to the RFP. Each of the two submissions proposed a variety of uses of the property including camping and various other educational, historical and rehabilitation elements. We engaged in a detailed review of the two responses, including meeting with each set of applicants to assure that we had a full understanding of the details and shortcomings of the proposals. While both groups proposed interesting uses of the property, neither of the proposers had in place funding or financing to make their proposals a reality, which was a primary requirement of the RFP. Because of this, in July of 2012, we formally discontinued the RFP process.

During this time, DEEP's staff also engaged in a significant historic evaluation and photo documentation of all the buildings and structures on the entire property. That extensive report was prepared to the standards of the State Historic Preservation Office, and has been permanently archived at the Thomas Dodd Center at the University of Connecticut.

Since the state took over the property, it has become increasingly popular with the public for walking (and dog walking), fishing, wildlife viewing, and other passive recreation activities, but at the same time, the enjoyment of the property is marred by the significantly deteriorated condition of the buildings and infrastructure. The continued deterioration, exacerbated by continual vandalism and damage caused by theft of metals, primarily copper piping, from the many buildings, has led to the need for us to dedicate significant agency police resources to patrolling the area, and investigating crimes, which have resulted in a number of arrests of responsible parties.

We certainly appreciate the concern of community members who are frustrated with the current state of the property, and understand that all the time and work dedicated thus far by the agency has not translated into positive changes on the property yet. We are committed to moving forward with clean-up and demolition on the site to make the property safe and enjoyable for the public. To that end, we have contractors on site now engaging in removal of hazardous and dangerous materials, and will be moving to the demolition phase of the clean-up in the coming weeks and months.

The bill also requests that a report provide information regarding the Agency's plans for use of the property, and if there are plans to sell the land. We anticipate continuing the process of making the property safer by removing the derelict structures and restoring the land to make it available for passive recreation by the public. DEEP has no plans to sell the land.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department's views on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact the Department's legislative liaison, Robert LaFrance, at (860) 424-3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov.